Lifestyle

SALAD Forum Brings 14 Judicial Candidates Before Miami-Dade Voters

Alex Annunziato (Group 11/5); Arthur LeMar "Marty" McNeil (Group 11/5); Maribel Diaz (Group 25); Renee Gordon (Group 11/35); Monica Segura (Group 11/5); Cristobal David Padron (Group 11/35); Judge Mavel Ruiz (Group 11/67); Judge Luis Perez-Medina (Group 25); Robert Pelier, Esq. (Moderator); Lissette Monzon (KFHA Director); Nina Tejera (Assistant Moderator); Juan D'Arce, M.S.Ed. (President SALAD); Destiny Alvarez (Group 11/67); Rita Maria Baez (Group 11/69); Bonita Jones-Peabody (Group 11/69); Yaneth DelCarmen Baez (Group 11/69); Judge Spencer Eig (Group 11/76); and Yenly Dominguez (Group 11/76).

Photo courtesy of SALAD

By Cameron Smith

Fourteen candidates competing in six Miami-Dade judicial races appeared before voters July 22 during a community forum focused on the often-overlooked judicial portion of the ballot.

The Spanish American League Against Discrimination, commonly known as SALAD, organized the nonpartisan forum with the Kendall Federation of Homeowners Associations. The event was held at the Kendall Village Center Civic Pavilion, commonly called the "Little House."

According to organizers, all 14 confirmed candidates attended.

The participating candidates represented five contested seats on the 11th Judicial Circuit and one Miami-Dade County Court race.

Candidates for 11th Judicial Circuit, Group 5, were Alex Annunziato, Arthur LeMar "Marty" McNeil and Monica Segura.

Group 35 candidates were Renee Gordon and Cristobal David Padron. Group 67 candidates were Destiny Alvarez and Mavel Ruiz.

Rita Maria Baez, Yaneth Del Carmen Baez and Bonita Jones-Peabody appeared as candidates for Group 69, while Yenly Dominguez and Spencer Eig represented Group 76.

Maribel Diaz and Luis Perez-Medina participated as candidates for Miami-Dade County Court, Group 25.

SALAD President Juan D'Arce opened the program. Lissette Monzon represented KFHA President Michael Rosenberg, and seven-year-old Juan D'Arce III led attendees in the Pledge of Allegiance.

Attorney Robert Pelier served as moderator, with Nina Tejera assisting.

"Of the three branches of government, the judiciary is arguably the one we understand least — yet it touches our daily lives more directly than almost any other," D'Arce said.

Unlike candidates seeking many legislative or executive offices, judicial candidates must operate within rules limiting what they may say about cases, disputed legal issues and matters that could come before them on the bench. Forums therefore tend to focus on professional experience, courtroom background, judicial temperament and approaches to administering a courtroom fairly and efficiently.

"And still, most of us walk into the voting booth knowing less about our judicial candidates than we do about a stranger running for a seat we'll never notice," D'Arce said.

"That has to change."

The six races will appear on the Aug. 18 nonpartisan ballot. Every eligible Miami-Dade voter may participate in the judicial contests, regardless of political-party registration.

In races with two candidates, the candidate receiving the most votes will win the seat. In races with three candidates, a candidate receiving a majority of the primary vote will be elected. If no candidate receives a majority, the two candidates with the highest vote totals will advance to the Nov. 3 general election.

"When you hand people the tools to make an informed choice, they show up," D'Arce said.

In the coming weeks, the South Dade News Leader will publish judicial candidate profile cards to help readers compare the candidates before voting. Every candidate will receive the same questions and space to provide information about their professional background, courtroom experience and qualifications.

Responses may be edited for length and clarity, but not for substance. The newspaper will also identify candidates who do not submit information before the publication deadline.

The profiles are intended to help readers evaluate the candidates using a consistent format without endorsing or favoring anyone in the contested races.

Coming Next Week: Captain Jim Anson, A Fascinating History

One of Jim's favorite photos shows him prior to his first jump in Airborne School.

Photo obtained by Hugh Hudson

By Hugh Hudson

On July 22, the South Dade News Leader sat down with Jim Anson for a video oral-history interview.

While Anson, a U.S. Coast Guard-licensed captain, is most widely known as a world-record-holding fisherman and fishing guide, we also heard stories of his time in Laos as one of the first Green Berets, his contributions to the archaeological history of South Florida and his assistance to Mel Fisher in the hunt for treasure in the Florida Keys.

Longtime readers of the News Leader may also remember Jim's fishing column in the sports section of the newspaper.

Jim was born in Indiana in 1939 and spent his early years on a small family farm in Griffith. During a visit to his grandparents, who had recently moved to Florida, Jim recalled, "My dad went out fishing and caught some snook over at Marco Island with his brother. He came back and said, 'I'm going back to sell the farm.' I haven't been back [to Indiana] since."

Jim, however, would not become a passionate fisherman until much later.

After graduating from Coral Gables High School, Jim joined the Army in 1959 to become a paratrooper. He trained in radio communications and, after jump school, was assigned to the 101st Airborne Division.

"And they said, 'Don't volunteer for anything,'" Jim told us.

"I ended up volunteering for everything."

That is how he became one of the first Green Berets and met John Fitzgerald Kennedy.

For more of Jim Anson's history, watch for the first installment of our two-part series in next week's edition of the News Leader.

A video of the interview will be released at a later date.

Faith & Inspiration

Liability of Independence

By Vincent V. Marshburn

It should come as no surprise that many countries around the world observe a designated period of time commemorating their independence from colonial dominion or their founding or unification as a sovereign state.

The Bible certainly indicates that human rulers are not ordained with unrestricted power (Deuteronomy 17:14-20; Proverbs 29:2; Romans 13:1-7), and the organizing of human government should ideally provide prudent balance between law and liberty.

Independence does not necessarily equate to isolation. We were designed to thrive in environments that foster social harmony and concern for mutual welfare while still esteeming the value of each person individually. The United States' own Declaration of Independence emphasizes the conviction that human beings have been granted certain prerogatives and privileges by the Creator himself which facilitate our commission to steward his world (Genesis 1:28; 2:15).

The preamble to our Constitution affirms the intent of the emerging national consciousness to "promote the general welfare and secure the blessings of liberty." As written, these founding documents complement each other greatly. From the Declaration in 1776 to the Constitution in 1787, they have formalized the remarkable social contract which has helped guide us as a nation through many challenges and crises over the two and a half centuries following that initial assertion of solidarity.

The principle of personal value as a natural counterpart to common interest is a Biblical one. It is true that God empowered us with free will to exercise independent contemplation, deliberation, and judgment (Genesis 3).

This indicates he regards us with personal consideration and significance. It is also true that God imbued us with an ability to experience sympathy, empathy, compassion, and affinity for others — which involve interactions that extend beyond our own selves.

This indicates God expects us to form meaningful relationships and conduct ourselves with the same degree of regard for others as he has for each of us.

Some manifestations of independence might tend to disproportionately emphasize individualism — not merely the sense of uniqueness that derives from cognizance of individuality and identity, but the notion of supremacy of the individual over any other concerns, not necessarily accounting for social impact or obligation. As believers, we understand that we are all essential components of a greater whole, possessing independent qualities which are intended to operate jointly, cooperatively, and interdependently (Romans 12:5; 1 Corinthians 12; Ephesians 4:15-16).

Humankind's fall from grace illustrates how seeking independence without a reliable foundation upon which to build leads to regrettable results. When we find ourselves without a balanced social, psychological, ethical, and even spiritual framework in which to engage our sense of identity, we may often find that we suffer from lack of understanding and appreciation for both the self and the community at large.

In an episode of the television series "Star Trek: The Next Generation," the crew of the 25th-century USS Enterprise respond to an apparent distress call and discover a crashed starship on the surface of a moon. Among the wreckage they find a number of bodies of Borg drones, including a lone comatose survivor.

The Borg are a literally single-minded Collective of cybernetic humanoids who seek to assimilate any other species which are identified as possessing useful traits that can further enhance the capabilities of the Collective. This forceful assimilation is non-negotiable on the part of the Borg, as they perceive it as part of their imperative for continued existence and expansion. Understandably, most sentient beings consider the Borg a threat to any sense of autonomy and unique identity.

Captain Jean Luc Picard is hesitant to provide aid to the Borg unit, but Doctor Beverly Crusher's medical instincts and obligation prevail. The Borg is confined to a holding cell with an energy field that restricts its ability to communicate long distance with the Collective. It is only natural that Picard, along with many aboard the Enterprise, find the presence of the Borg drone unsettling.

For its part, the captive Borg appears to find the experience of being unable to connect with the Collective to be quite disconcerting. Dr. Crusher and Chief Engineer Geordi La Forge spend time examining the Borg in an attempt to analyze any potential weaknesses that could be exploited as a means of defense — or indeed, offense — against the Collective. During their scrutinization, Geordi bestows the name "Hugh" on the drone (a mildly humorous distortion of the Borg's confused reference to itself as "you"), preferring a more personal appellation than its Collective designation of "Third of Five."

During Hugh's continued time and interaction with the crew, he develops an awareness and regard for individuality and independence from the hive mind. He begins to learn the value of self in the context of mutual social dependence and seems to form an especially close bond with Geordi, who attempts to explain the worth of willing cooperation in contrast to coercion.

LAFORGE: We are all separate individuals. I am Geordi. I choose what I want to do with my life. I make decisions for myself. For somebody like me, losing that sense of individuality is almost worse than dying.

HUGH: When you sleep, there are no other voices in your mind?

LAFORGE: No.

HUGH: Are you ever lonely?

LAFORGE: Sometimes. But that's why we have friends.

HUGH: Friends?

LAFORGE: Sure. Someone you talk to, who will be with you when you're lonely. Someone who makes you feel better.

HUGH: Like Geordi and Hugh.

Even Picard comes to eventually recognize Hugh's evolution and progress as a unique individual with an inkling of self-determination, distinct from the Collective. Picard also realizes that despite all this, it would be best to allow Hugh to return to the Borg hive with such individuality intact. The hope is that perhaps Hugh's newfound sense of singular self-awareness might propagate through the Collective communal link and impart to the Borg an understanding and respect for individual autonomy.

The ability to choose, to make decisions, to exercise our free will is perhaps our greatest gift and greatest burden. The liability of independence is that we must accept full responsibility for our choices and bear the consequences. As human beings in God's image, we are intended to live free from oppression, tyranny, and coercion of thought, belief, or action. With this freedom, we are exhorted to choose wisely.

Ultimately, our independence and freedom in Christ liberates us from domination and subjugation by the ruthless regime of sin (Galatians 5:1). As believers, our best demonstration of true spiritual independence is to depend wholly on God's redemption that restores the harmony between self and society.

To submit an announcement, email wording and jpg photo to Cameron@NewsLeaderSouthDade.com, or call 305-245-2311.
Print deadline is Wednesday at Noon.